

Town Without Grocer for Over 1,000 Days

By MORAG MACLACHLAN

This Saturday marked the 1,000th day that Duxbury has been without a grocery store.

Earlier in the week, the Economic Advisory Committee held a meeting in which members spoke of the fate of the old A&P plaza. The selectmen's representative to the committee, Andre Martecchini, reported on talks he had with property manager Bill Kaul of Mellon Financial Corp.

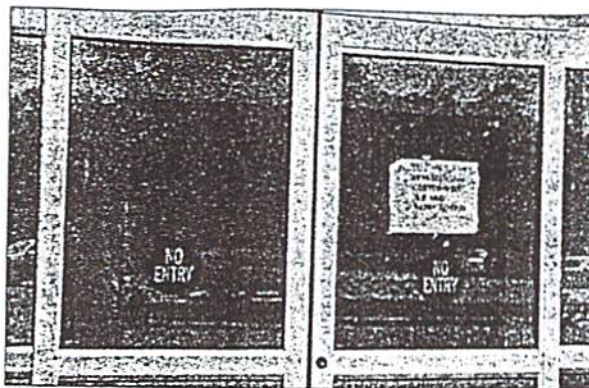
"He said that there is a food store that is very interested. But there is no proposal as of yet," Martecchini said. "The food store owner has met with the town manager, the Board of Health and the Planning Board. He is very interested and has done market analysis."

Mellon's vice president of media relations, Joe Ailinger, confirmed Martecchini's comments.

"Mellon is in serious, ongoing negotiations with several prospective tenants for the Hall's Corner Plaza, and we continue to work diligently toward an agreement. The prospective tenants are conducting their own research and due diligence, and Mellon is meeting or speaking with them regularly to address their questions and concerns. We also have been in contact with town officials to keep them apprised of developments," Ailinger said.

Since there is no proposal on the table, both Ailinger and Martecchini declined to reveal the name of the owner and the food store. Martecchini did say this person had not been a player in the past. Previously, Jim McInnis, owner of Village Market, Inc., in Roslindale and Scituate, had expressed an interest in the property.

Martecchini said the individual researching the property now wanted 15,000 square feet. The vacant store is 20,000 square feet. He added that a hardware store owner was "chomping at the bit." However, this person, who also could not be named,



The doors of the former Grand Union grocery store closed over 1,000 days ago.

Photo by Kelly Clark

wanted a store that was 10,000 square feet. Martecchini said if the grocer and the hardware store become definite proposals, then existing stores in the plaza may be reconfigured. Martecchini stressed that while this was progress, neither interested party was a done deal.

The septic system for the building needs to be redone. Back in December, former Health Agent Jennifer Dalrymple said perc tests were conducted on the property. Martecchini said the price tag for a new septic system could run between \$300,000 and \$500,000.

"We, too, want a speedy resolution to the current situation, but the substantial market challenges and business decisions involved have prolonged the process," Ailinger said. "Please be assured that Mellon Financial remains committed to finding a reasonable and practical solution for the space in Hall's Corner. We recognize the property's importance to many in the Duxbury community and are continuing our best efforts to resolve the matter as quickly as possible."

But for all of Ailinger's optimism, Duxbury Business Association Vice President Brian Cook feels the hole left by the closing of Grand Union could have been filled a long time ago. Cook said he has provided Mellon with at least five interested parties from supermarket owners to shop-

ping center developers to individual shopkeepers. However, Cook said Mellon dismissed all of these options.

"It's the largest commercial space in town and it's empty," Cook said.

He added that he was pleased to learn that C & S Wholesale Grocers, Grand Union's parent company, recently hired Marc Smith of Duxbury as its new co-president. Smith is the former president and CEO of Stop & Shop. C & S did not return calls for comment before press time.

A statement on the company's website released at the end of July reported C&S Wholesale Grocer's Chairman and CEO Rick Cohen as stating "Marc is a proven grocery industry leader and we are fortunate that he has decided to join C&S. He will be a key player in overseeing C&S's operations and navigating C&S's future growth." Cook hopes this future growth involves finding a suitable replacement for the defunct Grand Union space in town soon.

"With the current developments in discussions about a supermarket and with Marc Smith, a Duxbury resident, involved now, hopefully we'll get some movement," Cook said.

The lease with C&S expires in 2007 with a five-year option at a cost of about \$160,000 a year to the New Hampshire based company.